



Equitable Access to Effective Educator Plan – Frankfort Independent Schools

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This article highlights one district's efforts to improve opportunity and achievement for all students. It includes how the district used the revised equity diagnostic in the Comprehensive School/District Improvement Plan (CS/DIP) to review data, identify barriers and root causes, set goals and develop strategies to address the inequities that exist within the district.

New Leadership takes on Tradition

Like many districts, Frankfort Independent Schools' (FIS) rich tradition of equity has been challenged over the years by changes in culture, rendering lower student performance especially among minority and impoverished populations. With a new vision, FIS looks to reclaim the excellence of learning opportunities that was once a foundation. No more test-preparation instructional strategies and rigor-free, relationship-building activities; FIS is poised and ready for a fresh perspective, a new look and a new leadership team.

Dr. Houston Barber, a son of Frankfort and former Frankfort High School folk hero, returned to the district this past school year *to transform lives by instilling 21st century skills and inspiring lifelong learning in every student through an unparalleled experience and tradition of excellence* (FIS vision statement).

He took the reins of the district knowing that he would have to challenge current teaching practices by promoting a new brand of excellence in education, while rebuilding the tradition that has defined Frankfort Independent Schools for many years. He recognized that the district could no longer settle for teachers instructing within a system of disconnects with limited access to supports and leadership intents. He observed that not all children had access to exceptional teaching and learning opportunities and that he needed to immediately surround himself with successful teacher leaders to define and own effective instructional processes and possibilities in education. What was Frankfort Independent's initial step in ensuring that each child within the school system receive that instructional connect and be supported by a community of effective educators?

Reviewing Equity Data

Dr. Barber assembled thought leaders within each school's professional learning community and hired educators who had successful track records in designing high-functioning data review processes to analyze the district's equitable access measurements. The district utilized the [Kentucky Department of Education's diagnostic tool](#) to generate a new matrix. This is a sampling of what the review teams found after interpreting the district data related to *equitable access to effective educators*:

- Low-performing students were more likely taught by a teacher who did not have the necessary qualifications or successful experiences to meet the needs of each student;
- Minority students have had limited to no access to effective minority educators.

Barriers and Root Causes

The district review teams took a deep dive into the underlying barriers, challenges, and root causes that the equity data revealed. The teams determined that:

- The district's lowest performing student populations were not adequately supported by teachers who had instructional leadership experiences – teachers who were leading in instruction were not utilizing their talents in classrooms that most needed their expertise;
- The district provided limited supports and expectations for teachers to receive extended education (additional graduate work, National Board Certification, etc.) in their specialized area;
- The district was not in partnership with institutions of higher education to provide teachers with on-going professional learning experiences;
- The district did not provide “grow your own” teacher academies to tap into the secondary school’s pool of potentials (especially with underrepresented populations of students) to become the teacher leaders of the future.

Goal Setting

The review teams then established goals that reflect the schools’ needs related to ensuring equitable access.

1. Increase the number of National Board Certified Teachers;
2. Increase teacher-supports for *on-time* professional development opportunities;
3. Identify teacher leaders who have demonstrated valued “evidence-based” successes to provide professional development for teachers throughout the district;
4. Decrease “effective” teacher turnover rates;
5. Increase teacher efficacy by empowering teachers to have direct impacts on systematic and systemic processes with their respective knowledge and skill sets;
6. Establish *grow your own* teacher career pathways.

Strategies and Support Processes

The district honored the requirement to embed equitable access to effective educators planning and implementation efforts into the comprehensive district improvement plan.

The following is a sample list of Frankfort Independent Schools' implementation strategies:

- Retain and hire teacher leaders who have demonstrated student access to exceptional learning events and purposeful opportunities;
- Provide on time, ongoing, job-embedded professional learning supports to improve teacher/leader effectiveness;
- Establish peer coaching and teacher mentorship programs;
- Integrate digital platforms that provide students with foundational learning (supported by valid and reliable research) – SUMMIT Basecamp;
- Ensure that teacher demographic representation mirrors student demographic representation;
- Design e-instruments that provide educators with professional growth matrices;
- Provide *Literacy and Math Design Collaborative* supports;
- Establish an equity workgroup guided by convergence and coherence models;
- Establish *Student Response Teams* – a collaborative effort to target student needs.

Once implemented, these strategies should assist schools in meeting the goals set in the previous section and begin to directly impact student learning and engagement outcomes. This plan is a work in progress.

Additional Consideration: A Pipeline to Effective Educators

Frankfort Independent Schools has formed a partnership with Kentucky State University (KSU) to move and redefine effective education practices as they impact educator preparation. The goal is to ensure that these practices are modeled and embedded in pathway coursework and clinical field experiences. By supporting this strategy, progressive professor leaders, FIS teacher leaders, and teachers of expertise throughout the state will work with KSU's teacher education faculty regarding the implementation of the [Kentucky Academic Standards](#), the [Professional Growth and Effectiveness System](#) (PGES), [Kentucky Teacher Leadership Framework](#), and the Prichard Committee's [Excellence with Equity – It's Everybody's Business](#) (2016). These strategies will better prepare and support new teachers to become and sustain their effort as effective leaders inside and outside of the classroom.

Dr. Barber envisioned that colleges of education across the state also would provide teachers with access to a community of integrated supports facilitated by the teaching profession – connections that will provide our promising teachers with access to community-impacting academic opportunities, social and emotional outlets and career coaching and mentorships. In turn, teachers will facilitate these supports and connections to directly impact the learning of each child, establishing a new tradition of teaching excellence and student success.

This article, contributed by Dr. Ron Chi, Chief Academic Officer of FIS and Innovation Officer of Kentucky State University, is the first in a series designed to narrate the district's journey to provide every child with equitable access. For more information, consult [Kentucky's Plan for Equitable Access](#) and/or contact Ron at Ron.Chi@KYSU.edu.
